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United Macedonia Diaspora Global Conference Remarks

June 24, 2011

As Prepared

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to be here today at the United Macedonian Diaspora's third annual Global Conference.

As friend and partner, the United States has stood by Macedonia since its independence, helping it to strengthen its multiethnic democracy and market economy and assisting it in progressing toward our shared goal of its full integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Thanks to the hard work of its people, and with strong support from the Diaspora, Macedonia has come a long way. And today, our partnership has never been closer. We appreciate the constructive role that Macedonia is taking both regionally and globally.

To highlight just a few facets of our deepening cooperation, we are working together in southeast Europe; as Adriatic Charter partners; and through multilateral institutions like the OSCE and the UN. Macedonian and U.S. soldiers are serving bravely together in Afghanistan. These are significant contributions Macedonia is making, and we are grateful for them.

The United States remains committed to seeing Macedonia in NATO and the EU. To achieve this, however, there are still a number of significant challenges that the Macedonian government must recognize and work to overcome.

The most obvious of these challenges, if not necessarily the most significant, is the long-standing “name” dispute with Greece. It may seem unfair that the process of Macedonia’s Euro-Atlantic integration is tied so closely to this emotional issue. Fair or unfair, however, the reality of the linkage is inescapable and we must all deal with the world as it is. Failure to resolve this issue hurts Macedonia. This

dispute prevents Macedonia from achieving its rightful place in NATO and the European Union, and the time to resolve it is right now.

Resolving the name issue is also important to Macedonia's long-term political stability. Euro-Atlantic integration will give all Macedonians the recognition, confidence and respect—and the seats and voices at important international tables—to help make Macedonia and the whole region more stable and more prosperous in the 21st century.

Prime Ministers Gruevski and Papandreou have met privately, confidentially, and respectfully to discuss this matter. This respect and contact had been missing for many years. That it is now evident is a welcome step forward. These meetings demonstrate that the two parties can work together without hand-holding from the United States or other parties. The two Prime Ministers have the vision and standing to agree on a mutually acceptable solution.

There is not an easy solution to this dispute. There is no scenario in which *either* side can get a solution they feel is historically accurate, or one that is politically desirable. It will require compromises from both parties. Compromise is not easy when you are convinced of the rightness of your cause, but it demonstrates national qualities of maturity and self-confidence. It is often dissatisfying, even painful, but the political pain will be temporary. Pain is likely to be felt more keenly by you in the Diaspora than by those Macedonians living in Macedonia. It is easier to hold onto absolutist or uncompromising positions from a distance. Citizens in both countries are eager for a more normal relationship.

The time for a resolution is now. Macedonia has just had elections and a new government will be formed soon. The political parties have enough other issues to address without the distracting siren song of nationalism. I can assure you that the United States would not encourage the government of Macedonia to accept a solution that threatens the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or the identity of the state and its citizens.

I am eager to see a solution not only because we want to welcome you in NATO, but also because it would advance Macedonia's EU integration. The EU integration process improves the daily lives of citizens. The integration process is an engine that drives reforms, and not moving forward in this process is slowing

reforms. Independently of the name dispute, there are worrisome indications that Macedonia is losing momentum in the process of EU accession. There has been no recent progress – and, in fact, some regression – in the areas of rule of law, independent judiciary, corruption, and independent media.

Elections are over and we expect the new government, in whatever form it takes, to rededicate itself to these reforms. The new government must recognize that reform is not an issue for only one party. Genuine reform requires public debate on goals and legislation, cooperation with the opposition to work toward a consensus on the building of state institutions, and consultation with EU and other friends to ensure that reforms meet European standards

For too many years, political leaders in the Balkans have seemed to believe that victory in a democratic election gives the winner the right to control not only the parliament and the ministries, but also the judiciary, the police, the intelligence services, the media, major industries and other institutions. Croatia made a strategic decision in 2004 to leave this model behind and today is on the very doorstep of EU membership. Macedonia and all of its neighbors need to make the same decision, and the citizens must demand that parties respect the independence of these institutions.

This year is the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which ended the ethnic conflict threatening Macedonia's very existence. Unfortunately, the Agreement has not yet been fully embraced or consistently implemented. Macedonia is a multi-ethnic society like all of its neighbors. And like its neighbors, if Macedonia wants to be successful and join the European Union, it must find a model that provides equal political rights for its citizens of all ethnicities. It must find a model that gives all communities a reason to be proud to be citizens of Macedonia.

At a crisis point in Macedonia's history, the Ohrid Framework Agreement salvaged the vision of multi-ethnic comity and enabled the country to move forward. That is what the Ohrid Framework Agreement was, and still is, about. It is no less relevant today than it was in 2001. The Macedonian government and citizens must rededicate themselves to the agreement in both letter and spirit.

There is no NATO member that will be happier than the United States to see Macedonia become a member of NATO. With the next NATO summit to be held in the United States, in the beautiful city of Chicago, membership would be an important milestone for Macedonia. I want so much to look forward to that handshake in Chicago between President Obama and a Macedonian leader, not just as partners, but as full Allies. But membership in NATO should not be viewed as just another achievement, or another medal to wear, or another flag to fly. It is a commitment that carries with it many responsibilities and obligations.

The United States has been pleased to see Croatia and Albania join NATO and take on those serious responsibilities. Macedonia has also begun the process of demonstrating its readiness and its seriousness of purpose. Last year brought an unprecedented joint deployment of Macedonian soldiers with Vermont National Guard. Macedonia has been one of the highest per capita troop contributors to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and we wish the Macedonian contingent continued success in its mission.

The United States places great importance on having a partner like Macedonia and seeing it succeed. We look forward to an ever-stronger partnership in the future: working together to advance Macedonia's own internal transformation on the path to full Euro-Atlantic integration and cementing a democratic, secure, and prosperous future for all our people.

Thank you.